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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 1986

BUCKS COUNTY COURIER TIMES

PENNSYLVANIA



Courier Times photo by Jay Crawford

Esther Frease's students gather around a globe with their letters seeking the release of Raoul Wallenberg

## Children's plea: 'Please let him free'

### 3rd-graders take a human rights project to heart

By Bob Calandra  
 Courier Times Staff Writer

Allison Calvello wants Raoul Wallenberg freed. So do Jennifer Lynn McBratner and Danny Daidone and Rory Spagnoli and Richard L. Porter.

In fact, all the children in Esther Frease's third-grade class at Oxford Valley Elementary School in Fairless Hills want the Swedish World War II human rights activist liberated from prison. The Soviet Union arrested him in 1945.

The class has dispatched letters to President Reagan asking him to negotiate Wallenberg's release with Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. The children also are posting a batch of letters with the same message to Gorbachev.

"Letting him go would be a gesture of good will," Calvello wrote to Gorbachev. "People all over the world would think of you as a hero if you would let this fine man

come home."

"Our reading group in school would be delighted if you let him (go) free," wrote Mat Homa. "We're not saying you have to, but please let him free . . ."

Wallenberg was seized by Soviet authorities Jan. 17, 1945, near Budapest, Hungary. Carrying Swedish diplomatic status, he was sent to the Hungarian capital by the United States War Refugee Board.

Credited with saving 100,000 people from Nazi death camps between July 1944 and January 1945, he was arrested by the Soviets, who later claimed he died of a heart attack in a Moscow jail in 1947.

Those who believe Wallenberg is still alive say he has been seen and spoken to as late as 1979. In 1981, he was made an honorary United States citizen by an act of Congress.

Frease knew little about Wallenberg until she watched a television miniseries.

"I thought, what an amazing man," she

said. "I began to think what a man like that might mean to children."

In a world where Rambo is offered as an American hero, Frease felt compelled to introduce her students to Wallenberg.

"That was probably the main reason I brought it to them," she said.

She introduced the human rights project just before the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Geneva. The Pennsbury School District teacher told her charges to discuss human rights with their families, "especially as it related to Raoul Wallenberg."

The children were directed to the library to learn more about Wallenberg; they discussed him in class. And then came the decision to write letters seeking his release.

Recalling the 1982 letter by a 10-year-old Maine girl to Soviet Premier Yuri Andropov to plead for world peace, Frease said, "Samantha Smith got a response. We're hoping we will."

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